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## PERCEPTUAL CORRELATES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN LAGOS STATE

By

*Akinlaye, F.A., Jimoh, A.S. And Ibhaifidon, H.E.*

Department of Language, Arts and Social Science

Education Faculty of Education,

Lagos State University, Ojo

### ABSTRACT

*The study examined the perception of parents, pre-primary school teachers, pre-primary school inspectors of the Ministry of Education and pre-primary school proprietors in Lagos state on their expectations of the curriculum, infrastructure, language acquisition and the objectives of sending children to pre-primary school institutions. Information gathered through a questionnaire administered to 310 respondents was analyzed with Simple Percentage and the Chi-Square Statistic Formula. The finding negated the general assumption that pre-primary schools are mainly established without due consideration of the need for elaborate provision of human, material equipment and structural facilities necessary for enhancing creativity through fostering self-expression in students. The study further revealed that respondents were unanimous on the best early childhood education for children's holistic development and growth into adulthood.*

### Introduction

In Nigeria, as in many countries in the world, more children attend pre-primary schools both in the rural and urban centers. The pre-primary school education, as it is now known, is a recent development, which had been foreseen in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The 1960's in the United States of America (USA) witnessed a revival of early childhood education, for exactly the same reason, which the early progressive educationists had advocated, by such leaders as Froebel, Montessori, Bruner, McMillan sisters and many others. Conditions of living of that time had created slum cultures that produced social problems. In each case, it was observed and recognized that lack of experience and lack of self-esteem, which proved very difficult to correct and overcome. Significantly, children from better homes were seemingly observed to have escaped these slum problems, and it was thought that proper early education in the slum homes were inadequate.

Consequently, developed countries such as Britain, France, Russia, and Belgium shared out of the experience of United States of America, to establish early childhood education institutions, with the expressed hope of improving the intellectual achievement of the children in the primary school.

In Nigeria, the genesis of pre-primary school education dated back to the colonial days, when it became necessary to preserve the intellectual ability and native intelligence of colonial officials. In the 1960's, the number of such institutions increase as a result of influx of children of various Europe, American and Asia citizens who were working in cities and different parts of the country. In addition, the number of Nigeria professionals had tremendously increased and was fast demanding same head-start educational treatment by sending their children to pre-primary school institutions.

The introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) Scheme in the country in 1975 liberalized primary education. This system of education forced working mothers to seek "domestic solace" in a local pre-primary school institution where their children could receive not only the necessary custodian-care in their absence, but also some introduction of leaning activities as a preparatory plant form for entry into primary education (Orebanjo, 1980).

The Nigerian Government, having become fully conscious of the need for pre-primary school education, enacted the policy on and purpose of the pre-primary education in the Nigerian National Policy on Education in 1981 and revised it in 1998 and 2004. The Policy stated inter-alia that the pre-primary school education shall:

- Effect a smooth transition from the home to the school;
- Prepare the child for the primary (elementary) level of education;
- Provide adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work;
- Inculcate in the child, the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, the local environment, art, music and playing with meaningful and relevant toys etc;
- Develop a sense of cooperation and team spirit;
- Learn good habits, especially good health habits; and
- Teach the rudiments of numbers, letters, colours, shapes, forms, etc through play activities.

Thus, this enactment is a solid proof that the government is alive to the needs of the citizens for pre-primary school education. Expectantly, the views about there primary school education vary from one individual to another and from one country to another. The literature on these differences is especially on the values of pre-primary school education (Fafunwa 1972). However, Awoniyi (1982) sees pre-primary school education differently, as he perceives it as a "Social remedial service for children in dire need". This implies that pre-primary school education is perceived as a compensatory education for young children who are deprived, so as to redress the children's social life from disadvantaged homes.



From the available literature, there are two main schools of thought on the values of pre-primary school education. The first school emphasizes the instrumental aim of education as the main purpose. Their argument is based on the acquisition of knowledge and academic achievement in the school (Bloom 1969). They also see the need for cognitive enrichment at the early age of children.

The second schools of thought stress the expressive aim of education as main purpose of pre-primary school education. They based their assertions on the need for child's creativity, social development, intellectual progress and personality adjustment (Hendrick 1980; Awoniyi 1982; and Maduesi 1999).

These schools of thought have led to many conflicting perceptions of what should be as the proper function of pre-primary school education. This is because different individuals, oblivious of provisions of Nigerian National Policy on Education (1998 and 2004) on pre-primary school education, views motivate the need to investigate how different individuals perceived the function of pre-primary school education.

### Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in the study:

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant difference in the perceptions of parents, teacher, pre-primary school inspectors and proprietors on the purpose of sending children to early childhood institutions.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant difference in parents, teacher, pre-primary school inspectors' and proprietors' perceptions of the curriculum of early childhood education.

### Methodology

**Respondents:** A total of three hundred and ten (310) respondents drawn from five (5) randomly sampled Local Government Areas (out of the twenty) in Lagos State were involved in the study. These were Amuwo, Odofin, Ikeja, Ikorodu, Kosofe and Ojo Local Government Areas.

### Sampling Techniques

Stratified sampling procedure was adopted to divide the parent respondents into civil servants and businessmen groups. The simple random sampling technique was then applied for selecting respondents' among the registered pre-primary school proprietors, teachers and pre-primary schools' inspectors in the selected Local Government Areas.

Two hundred and fifty-nine (259) copies of the questionnaire (83.85%) were retrieved out of the 310 distributed. The 259 consisted of 99 (38.22%) pre-primary school teachers, 80 (30.89%) pre-primary school inspectors and 31 (11.58%) parents, 49 (18.92%) pre-primary school inspectors and 31 (11.58%) proprietors.

### Instrumentation

A self-developed questionnaire was used to elicit specific information on early childhood education proprietors. The questionnaire was divided into two sections (A and B). Section A concentrated on demographic information while section B contained

fourteen items to elicit responses for testing the hypotheses formulated. Lecturers in the Early Childhood Education Unit of the Department of Educational Foundations and Counseling Psychology, Faculty of Education validated the questionnaire. The reliability was established at 0.89 using the test-retest reliability.

### Result and Data Analysis

Simple percentage and Chi-square tests were carried out on the data generated for the four hypotheses postulated as illustrated in the tables below.

#### Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference in the perception of parents, teachers, and pre-primary school inspectors on the purpose of sending children to early childhood educational institutions. The hypothesis was tested with data generated from items 1, 2, 3 and 12. The responses were grouped together on the basis of categories of respondents and gender. The analysis is presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1:** Perception of Respondents on the reason for Sending Children to Pre-Primary School Education (in percentages)

N = 259

Subjects/Items 1,2,3,12	SA/A	D/SD	Total
Teachers			
Male (N = 8)	(28)4.79%	(224)38.36%	(4)0.88%
Female (N = 91)	(140)30.97%	(32)3.09%	(364)35.14%
Parents			
Male (N = 25)	(48)8.08%	(160)27.40%	(52)11.5%
Female (N = 55)	(60)13.27%	(100)9.65%	(220)21.24%
Pre-primary inspectors			
Male (N = 32)	(28)4.79%	(12)2.05%	(100)22.12%
Female (N = 17)	(56)12.39%	(128)12.36%	(68)6.56%
Proprietors			
Male (N = 3)	(8)1.37%	(76)13.01%	(4)0.88%
Female (N = 28)	(36)7.96%	(12)1.16%	(112)10.81%
Total	(584)56.37%	(452)43.63%	(1036)100%

Calculated  $X^2 = 131.73$

Degree of Freedom = 3

Table Value = 7.84

Level of Significance = 0.05

Table 1 shows a positive response of 56.37% to the items giving on the purpose of sending children to pre-primary school education against 43.63% negative response. The chi-square analysis shows that there was a significant difference in the perception held by the respondents on pre-primary school education.



## Hypothesis Two

There is no significant difference in parents, teachers, pre-primary school inspectors, and proprietors, perception of the curriculum of early childhood education.

The hypothesis was tested with data from items 5, 9 and 14. The responses were also grouped together based on type of respondent and gender. The analysis is presented in table 2.

**Table 2:** Perception of respondents on the Curriculum of Early Childhood Education (in percentages) N = 259

Subjects/Items 1,2,3,12	SA/A	D/SD	Total
Teachers			
Male (N = 8)	(18) 3.70%	(153) 31.48%	(6) 2.06%
Female (N = 91)	(120) 41.24%	(24) 3.09%	(273) 35.14%
Parents			
Male (N = 25)	(45) 9.26%	(90) 18.52%	(30) 10.31%
Female (N = 55)	(75) 25.77%	(75) 9.65%	(165) 21.24%
Pre-school inspectors			
Male (N = 32)	(66) 13.58%	(51) 10.49%	(30) 10.31%
Female (N = 17)	*	(96) 12.36%	(51) 6.56%
Proprietors			
Male (N = 3)	(6) 1.23%	(57) 11.755	(3) 1.03%
Female (N = 28)	(27) 9.28%	(9) 1.16%	(84) 10.81%
Total	(486) 62.55%	(291) 37.45%	(777) 100%
Calculated $X^2$	= 28.07	Degree of freedom	= 3
Table value	= 7.84	Level of significance	= 0.05

## Discussion

The study has attempted to survey the perception of some stakeholders in the early childhood (pre-primary) education system in Lagos state.

Two hypotheses were tested in the study. From hypothesis one, it was discovered that there was a significant difference in the perception of parents, teachers, inspectors and proprietors on the reasons for sending children to pre-primary schools in Lagos state. While pre-primary schools would be more intelligent and fluent in English Language speaking; parents, teachers and proprietors were optimistic about this as well as confirming that all children should be enlisted in pre-primary schools for educative purposes.

The analysis of hypothesis two shows a difference in the perception of the curriculum for early childhood education by the respondents. This finding should not be surprising since parents; mostly businessmen and civil servants are all somehow educated.

Hence, the pre-primary school education is expected to focus on equipping the young ones for future living in a fast changing society.

Therefore, while parents would want the pre-primary education to be a foundation for future economic interest of the children, the teachers and inspectors wanted a sound foundation for future education as stated in the NPE (2004).

There is a general acceptance that early childhood education is very crucial and critical to the overall development of the child. The child's cognitive enrichment, school development, physical development, language, emotional and moral development are all encompassed in the ideal environment of the pre-primary school institution. The findings further buttressed the notion that the pre-primary school environment provides special opportunity for the earlier identification of children with special difficulties and competencies for the earlier identification of children with special difficulties and competencies or gifts, which if neglected, may inhibit their intellectual progress. The findings in this study however negates the general assumption that pre-primary school institutions are established without due regard to elaborate provision and supervision of the human, material equipment and structural facilities necessary for enhancing creativity through fostering self-expression in the children.

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